

Summer 6-15-1997

## ENG 3009-053: Myth and Culture

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## English 3009C, Section 053

*Myth and Culture*

Dr. Bonnie Irwin  
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 Office Hours: MTWRF 9:30-10:30 & by appt.

MTWRF 10:30-12:30

Through comparative analysis of myths from selected cultural traditions, we will examine relationships among mythical, historical, anthropological and scientific ways of understanding. We will be reading primary texts of myths as well as secondary criticism, and the class will consist of lecture and discussion based upon these readings. The course is divided into roughly 4 sections: Tibetan Buddhist Mythology (Myth and Religion, Myth and Biography); Navajo Mythology (Myth and Culture, Myth and Nature); Mayan Mythology (Myth and Cosmology, Myth and History); Greco-Roman Mythology (Myth and Literature, Myth and Art). Along the way, we will be discussing other traditions as well as our own mythologies and how we interact with them.

## Required texts:

Lhalungpa, L. *The Life of Milarepa*.  
 Ovid. *Metamorphoses*.  
 Tedlock, D. *Popol Vuh*  
 Zolbrod, P. *Diné Bahane': The Navaho Creation Story*

## Grading:

Quizzes	20 points each	200
Papers	100 points each	300
Exams	75 points each	225
Theory reports	50 points each	100
In-Class Essay	75 points	75
<u>Attendance &amp; Participation</u>		<u>100</u>
Total		1000

A = 900-1000  
 B = 800-899  
 C = 700-799  
 D = 600-699  
 F = 0-599

## Information for Students with Disabilities:

If you have a documented disability and wish to receive academic accommodations, please contact the Coordinator of the Office of Disability Services (581-6583) as soon as possible.

## Quizzes:

There will be quizzes throughout the term as indicated on the syllabus. These will be based on the reading assigned for the day on which they are given. Keep in mind that taking a quiz and failing it will count more than not showing up at all. There will be no make-ups given on quizzes. Keep up with the reading and you should be in good shape here.

**Exams:**

There will be three examinations. They will consist primarily of short answer and essay questions. If you have done the reading, attended class regularly, and paid attention to the films, they should not be that difficult. For all exams, a selection of essay topics will be distributed beforehand and essay questions are always open-book. In lieu of a final, there will be an in-class essay, topic to be distributed in advance.

**Attendance:**

I take attendance each class period, but there are no points assigned to attendance itself. You are responsible for taking care of your own absences: getting the notes from a classmate, getting any handouts and assignments from me. It is obviously in your best interest to attend class every time because you will *always* miss something if you do not. In the Intersession, one day is equivalent to one week in a semester. See "Participation" for more information.

**Participation:**

100 points are allocated for participation. Keep up with the reading and come to class! We will also have frequent group projects that will be conducted in class. I will generally provide you with a question or task that you will address in small groups. Although the written and oral products of each group will be evaluated, what is most important is active participation. There will be no make-ups given on group assignments and in-class activities.

**Papers:**

All papers must be completed to pass the course. One late paper (2 days max) is allowed without penalty, and any paper may be turned in early. Any other late papers will be reduced in grade. I expect papers to be typed, well-organized, and written intelligently. See assignments on attached sheets.

**Myth Theory Reports:**

See attached assignment.

**Course Objectives**

- to break down cultural misunderstandings and barriers--
- to recognize similarities among cultures--
- to learn what myths are and how they function--
- to learn about cultures that may be unfamiliar--
- to learn more about our own culture and mythology--
- to learn different ways of teaching about cultures and texts--

## SYLLABUS

(Reading Assignments must be completed by the date they are listed. Writing Assignments, homework, etc. are listed in bold on the date they are due)

"Mythology is the study of whatever religious or heroic legends are so foreign to a student's experience that he cannot believe them to be true."  
(Robert Graves, British poet and myth scholar)

M     May 12     Introduction  
                      What is Myth?

### Unit I: Myth and Religion, Myth and Biography -- *The Life of Milarepa*

"Myths are other peoples' religion." (Sam Keen)

Tu     May 13     *Life of Milarepa*, pp. 9-35  
                      Introduction to Buddhism  
                      Film: *Little Buddha*

"Myth embodies the nearest approach to absolute truth that can be expressed in words."  
(Ananda Coomaraswamy, Indian philosopher)

W     May 14     *Life of Milarepa*, pp. 41-88  
                      [You may skip over the songs and poems]  
                      Quiz 1  
                      Film: *Little Buddha*

Myths describe the various and sometimes dramatic breakthroughs of the sacred (or the 'supernatural') into the World. Myth is regarded as a sacred story, and hence a 'true story,' because it always deals with *realities*. The cosmogonic myth is 'true' because the existence of the World is there to prove it." (Mircea Eliade, myth scholar)

Th     May 15     *Life of Milarepa*, pp. 89-145  
                      [You may skip over the songs and poems]  
                      Quiz 2  
                      **Myth Theory Reports due**

"To create a myth, that is to say, to venture behind the reality of the sense to find a superior reality, is the most manifest sign of the greatness of the human soul and the proof of its capacity for infinite growth and development." (Louis-Auguste Sabatier, French Protestant theologian)

F     May 16     *Life of Milarepa*, pp. 146-197  
                      [You may skip over the songs and poems]  
                      Exam 1  
                      Nirvana Project Workshop

### Unit II: Myth and Culture, Myth and Nature -- *Dine Bahane*

"The real point of myth is not to give an objective world picture; what is expressed in it, rather, is how we human beings understand ourselves in the world."  
(Rudolf Bultmann, German theologian)

M     May 19     *Dine Bahane*, part 1  
**Paper 1 due**  
Introduction to Navajo Culture

"Myth is a symbolic story which demonstrates the inner meaning of the universe and of human life." (Alan Watts, British expositor of Buddhism to the West)

Tu     May 20     *Dine Bahane*, part 2, pp. 81-125  
Quiz 3  
Film: *Fantasia*

"Myths are the day dreaming of the human race."  
(Sigmund Freud, father of psychoanalysis)

W     May 21     *Dine Bahane*, part 2, pp. 126-168  
Quiz 4  
**Myth Theory Reports due**

"Mythology is the womb of mankind's initiation into life and death."  
(Joseph Campbell, myth scholar)

Th     May 22     *Dine Bahane*, part 3, pp. 171-224  
Quiz 5  
Monster Project Workshop

"Myth gives man, very importantly, the illusion that he can understand the universe and that he does understand the universe." (Claude Levi-Strauss, French anthropologist)

F     May 23     *Dine Bahane*, part 3, pp. 224-278 and Part 4, pp. 281-292  
Exam 2

### Unit III: Myth and Cosmology, Myth and History -- *Popol Vuh*

M     May 26     MEMORIAL DAY   NO CLASS

"Myth is a past with a future, exercising itself in the present."  
(Carlos Fuentes, Mexican author)

Tu     May 27     *Popol Vuh*, parts 1 and 2  
**Paper 2 due**  
Film: *Popol Vuh*

"Myth is neither conscious poetry nor valid science, but the common root and raw material of both." (George Santayana, philosopher)

W     May 28     *Popol Vuh*, part 3  
Quiz 6  
**Myth Theory Reports due**

"Myth explains the why and how of the here and now."  
(Th. P. Van Baaren, professor of science and religion)

- Th May 29 *Popol Vuh*, part 4  
Quiz 7  
Film: *Dreamtales*
- F May 30 *Popol Vuh*, part 5  
Exam 3  
Cosmology Project Workshop

**Unit IV: Myth and Literature, Myth and Art -- *Metamorphoses***

- M June 2 *Metamorphoses*, Books 1 and 2  
**Paper 3 due**

"The friend of wisdom is the friend of myth." (Aristotle, Greek philosopher)
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- Tu June 3 *Metamorphoses*, Books 3 and 4  
Quiz 8  
Film: *Fantasia*

"These things never happened, yet they always are." (Saloustios, 4th century Greek scholar)
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- W June 4 *Metamorphoses*, Books 5 and 6  
Quiz 9  
Film: *Clash of the Titans* (excerpts)  
**Myth Theory Reports due**

"There is mythology now as there was in the time of Homer, only we do not perceive it. Mythology, in the highest sense, is the power exercised by language on thought in every possible sphere of mental activity." (F. Max Müller, linguist and scholar of myth)
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- Th June 5 *Metamorphoses*, Books 7 and 8  
Quiz 10  
Film: *The Odyssey* (excerpts)

- F June 6 **In-Class Essay**